



## Czech Republic 2011 Crime and Safety Report

Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Terrorism

Europe > Czech Republic

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Czech Republic 201 Crime and Safety Report

### Overall Crime and Safety

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy in Central Europe. The nation became a full member of the European Union in 2004 and a member of the Schengen Zone in 2007. The Schengen Agreement allows people inside signatory nations of the European Union to move freely without being stopped at national borders.

The U.S. Department of State has rated the Czech Republic as a 'low' crime threat location. Violent or confrontational crime is rare. The type of crime visitors are most likely to face is petty street crime, particularly pick pocketing. These incidents frequently occur in crowded tourist spots. Special caution is warranted in and around public transportation areas such as subways and train stations and when boarding and exiting trams. Other areas where tourists congregate in Prague, such as Charles Bridge, Wenceslas, and Old Town Squares are favored haunts of pickpockets and scam artists. The skilled, professional pickpocket rings can have as many as six to eight members on the street operating against the same target or group of targets. Members of these rings can vary in age and gender. The criminals rarely use violence or the threat of violence to perpetrate the crime. The victim is often distracted on the street or jostled on a crowded tram while their wallet or valuables are pick-pocketed. Most victims of pickpockets report being unaware of the incident taking place and realize it only after the fact. As the individuals may operate in groups and could conceivably be armed with simple weapons, victims should avoid direct confrontation with potential criminals. There are also reports of purse snatching or of handbags subtly lifted off chairs while victims are seated at outdoor cafes. Travelers transiting the nation on trains have reported surreptitious thefts of bags and valuables and should use appropriate caution.

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“Date rape” drugs such as Rohypnol have also been used at local bars and clubs, often reported to disable victims for robbery. Customers of these establishments are advised not to accept drinks from anyone other than waiters/waitresses and not to leave their drink unattended.

Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) are widely available throughout major cities in the Czech Republic. Visitors should change money only at banks, legitimate exchanges, or at ATMs. An offer to change money by an unknown person on the street is most likely tied to a scam. Almost all ATMs have multilingual instructions and allow access to U.S. bank accounts. Recently, the press has reported that criminal organizations are illegally obtaining users’ ATM card numbers and pin codes by electronically “skimming” the information from victims’ cards at public ATMs. This activity has reportedly occurred at ATMs in public areas, including within bank lobbies covered by security cameras and even at card access points to enter such lobbies. Visitors requiring ATM services should attempt to use machines at more secure or heavily traveled and monitored locations which may include commercial banks, large hotels, and the airport. Some ATM machines have a green translucent security device at the card input which is designed to inhibit the addition of an illegal skimming apparatus. Although not beyond compromise, the machines with these security enhancements may be more secure than standard ATMs. Personal bank account activity should be regularly and closely monitored.

Auto thefts and break-ins are common in the Czech Republic, especially in major cities. Travelers should use parking garages and some type of anti-theft device to discourage these incidents. Never leave anything of value unattended in a vehicle and certainly not in plain sight, due to the risk of theft. Vehicles are stolen for re-sale or for dismantlement and sale of parts locally or abroad. The Czech Republic also serves as a transit route for stolen cars from Western Europe. The recovery rate of stolen vehicles, as with most stolen property, is extremely low.

There have been reports of scams on Czech highways near foreign borders, particularly highways with Germany (e.g., D5). This activity appears to target foreign-plated (non-Czech) vehicles after entering the Czech Republic in an attempt to swindle unwitting travelers. The individuals (believed to be non-Czech nationals) often use older vehicles, particularly Mercedes Benz, Audi, BMW, or VW with license plates primarily from Germany (or other nations such as France, Holland or Romania). The individuals reportedly attempt to persuade drivers to stop, by using such tactics as: approaching from the rear with flashing headlights and hand signals; waving arms outside of the windows; raising a gas canister; or feigning a

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vehicle break-down. Once stopped, the individuals will solicit money for a family emergency or try to sell fake jewelry. The individuals can be persistent in their approach and may make drivers feel uncomfortable or intimidated. Distractions may also be used to steal items from vehicles. The use of violence or weapons has not been reported, but such possibilities should not be excluded. Be aware that Czech law enforcement agencies primarily use marked vehicles for traffic stops. On very limited occasions, unmarked vehicles may be used, but should bear temporary „police markings as well as a flashing blue light. Use of police imposter vehicles is not a trend currently encountered in this region. Drivers observing unusual, potentially criminal activity as outlined above should continue to drive normally, and not pull over or render assistance. Dial the pan-European emergency number (112) and inform the police.

Taxis are clearly marked. Visitors should be alert to the potential for substantial overcharging by taxis, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. Some taxi drivers charge unsuspecting foreigners two to three times (or more) than the standard rate. The U.S. Embassy is aware of a report involving an individual who hailed a taxi on a street near a popular nightclub. The individual was reportedly subsequently robbed and endured minor injuries prior to being dropped off outside of Prague. More alarmingly, the U.S. Embassy is also aware of sexual assault cases apparently involving taxis. U.S. Embassy personnel are encouraged to use more reputable taxi firms such as AAA (14-0-14). The best and most cautious approach for obtaining a taxi is to call the company directly rather than hail one on the street. This ensures your ride is logged through the company's dispatcher. Taxis should be clearly marked (ideally with a permanently installed roof lamp and taxi sign) and must have driver's information, with registration number, company name, and price list displayed on the front doors. Taxi drivers should use a taxi meter and provide a receipt (from the meter) upon completion of the trip. Visitors may also obtain a taxi at one of the "Fair Place" taxi stands regulated by the Prague municipality. The main taxi stand at Prague Ruzyně Airport has proven reputable in the past. Clearly marked taxis from AAA (14-0-14) and Radio Cab 1.1.1 service the stand. Visitors should avoid using taxis managed by individuals who independently approach them away from the taxi stand or inside the airport. Fares from the airport to the city center should run approximately 600CZK.

Czech bars and dance clubs are generally safe for the vast majority of visitors. However, as with many cities, tourists may be approached to purchase illicit drugs; commerce in illegal substances is against the law in the Czech Republic. Further, tourists may be targeted for pick-pocketing while in popular and crowded venues. Visitors should be mindful that security

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at nightclubs could respond more forcefully than at similar venues in the United States. Travelers should avoid altercations with bar personnel or other patrons. Finally, travelers should be aware that casinos and gaming establishments are government-regulated, but some have been affiliated with, or attracted the interest of, organized crime.

### **Political Violence**

While residents and visitors to the Czech Republic are not especially at risk at this time, the U.S. Department of State has issued a number of recent Public Announcements cautioning Americans worldwide, and particularly in Europe, to maintain a level of vigilance against potential terrorist incidents. All visitors are advised to be continually aware of their surroundings and be alert to suspicious activities or individuals. For the most recent travel announcements, consult [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

Civil disorder in the Czech Republic is rare, although strikes and demonstrations do occasionally occur. Public protests are usually non-violent and issue-centered.

Demonstrations are usually small and peaceful. Most demonstrations number less than fifty but have been known to exceed 500 participants. As in many countries around the world, there have also been incidents of violence involving rowdy fans at sporting events. Visitors should be cautious in any crowded venues. During these incidents and other demonstrations, the police were generally well prepared and handled the protesters in a professional and competent manner.

### **Post-specific Concerns**

The law covering traffic accidents in the Czech Republic was amended on January 1, 2009. If you are involved in a fender-bender without additional property damage, leaks of vehicular fluids, or injuries, and if vehicular damage is under 100,000 Kc, you may settle with the other driver without the police. However, due to potential communication problems and difficulties in calculating vehicle damage, visitors may have better results by not moving affected vehicles and awaiting the police. Leaving the scene of a traffic accident beyond the parameters outlined above is a violation of Czech law. The Czech Republic has a zero tolerance policy for drinking and driving, with a zero blood alcohol limit for operating a vehicle. Police may request administration of a breathalyzer test randomly or at the scene of a traffic accident. Depending upon blood alcohol level, the driver could face an official fine or criminal justice proceedings.

Czech law requires that drivers have their headlights on at all times when driving in the Czech Republic. The law additionally requires that all private cars, including those of foreign visitors, carry one of each of the following items: fluorescent green high visibility safety jacket, first aid

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kit, a spare pair of prescription glasses in the vehicle (if necessary for the driver), warning triangle, spare tire with changing tools, and complete set of spare bulbs/fuses.

Persons driving into the Czech Republic should be aware that a road usage tax sticker is required to drive legally on major highways. The stickers are available at gasoline stations on highways. Persons hiring rental cars, especially from neighboring countries, should check for the highway toll sticker and purchase one at the border. Failure to have the sticker or properly display it can result in a fine. Drivers should pay special attention to driving on cobblestone and among streetcars and tourists in historic city centers. Speed limits are 50 km/h in towns and 120km/h on highways. All traffic citations can result in on the spot fines.

Public transportation operates on the honor system with random inspection for a valid ticket by municipal transportation inspectors. Failure to have a ticket can result in a fine for immediate payment to the inspector. The transportation inspectors operate in plain-clothes but should display a small metal badge (emblazoned with the words "Pepravní Kontrola") when inspecting travelers' tickets. Fines range from 50 to 950 CZK, but the standard on-the-spot payment for traveling without a valid ticket is 700 CZK. Inspectors should provide a receipt upon payment. Tickets must be validated in the yellow stamp box at the entrance to the metro and on trams and buses.

Czech law requires foreigners to show, at the request of the Police, his/her identity by presenting a travel document, a residence permit card, or an identity card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For Americans visiting the Czech Republic as tourists, this means that you are expected to carry your passport with you. Travelers are urged to ensure the security of passports while moving about to prevent incidents of pick-pocketing or theft.

A few factors make the Czech Republic a vulnerable country for groups in the drug trade. These include its central location, the closure of most of the traditional customs posts along the nation's borders, and the low risk of asset confiscation. Detection of drug trafficking and money laundering has seen improvements. Although not an important regional financial center, both geographic and economic factors make the Czech Republic vulnerable to money laundering. Narcotics trafficking, smuggling, auto theft, arms trafficking, tax fraud, embezzlement, racketeering, prostitution, and trafficking in illegal aliens are the major sources of funds that are laundered in the Czech Republic currency exchanges, casinos, and other gaming establishments. Domestic and foreign organized crime groups have been known to target Czech financial institutions, currency exchanges, casinos, and other gaming establishments for money laundering activities. Czech law restricts the use of some law enforcement methods such as undercover operations, immunized witnesses, wiretaps, and

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government access to financial information, due in part to abuses of these and other police practices under Communism. As part of an anti-corruption legislative package, the Czech Ministry of Interior is proposing to change the law to again allow Czech Police more proactive investigative authority.

### **Police Response**

Tourism is a major industry and source of revenue for the Czech Republic. Incidents of police harassment or unwarranted detention are rare. Authorities attempt to respond to foreign residents and visitors in need. Police have assigned multilingual officers to stations throughout Prague and other Czech cities, and have placed police vans near major tourist sites. Despite these actions, the Czech Police have experienced manpower and resource limitations which have hampered more proactive policing initiatives in many areas, including areas frequented by foreigners. The police station at Vlasska #3, next to the U.S. Embassy, usually has an English-speaking officer available.

The emergency services number is 112, similar to 911 in the U.S. It is a 24-hour toll-free number where callers can request emergency assistance in English from Czech ambulance, fire and police services.

### **Medical Emergencies**

Prague has adequate Western-style medical clinics with English-speaking doctors and dentists. However, the Czech medical system is organized differently from the medical system in the United States. Even though central emergency rooms exist in most hospitals, patients are often sent to the facility which treats the specific medical condition (i.e., broken noses are sent to the ENT specialist, rather than to the general practitioner). There are family practices in the Czech Republic which function on a similar basis to those in the United States, but they are located mostly in big cities.

All major hospitals accept credit cards as a method of payment. Private specialists usually expect cash payment for health services, though some private facilities accept credit cards as well. Administrative staff at the majority of Czech medical facilities do not speak English. Hospitalization in the Czech Republic is much more liberal than in the United States; conditions that would be treated on an outpatient basis in the United States are often treated on an inpatient basis in the Czech Republic. Ambulance services are on par with U.S. standards. Response time is generally less than 15 minutes. Ambulance companies generally expect payment at the time of service. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost thousands of dollars or more. Please note that because euthanasia is not permitted under Czech law, U.S. living

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wills providing for no exceptional interventions to prolong life cannot be honored in the Czech Republic.

Travelers who plan to participate in camping or hiking in long grass or woodlands from April-October run the risk of both Tick-borne encephalitis and Lyme disease. All travelers should take precautions to prevent tick bites. While there is no vaccine for Lyme disease, visitors may obtain a vaccine for Tick-borne encephalitis in a three-shot series. The first two shots are given 2-4 weeks apart and the last shot 9-12 months after the second. Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food, water precautions, and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the CDC website. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the infectious diseases section of the World Health Organization (WHO) website. The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information.

The U.S. Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether the policy applies overseas and whether it covers emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation.

*Emergency contact numbers*

Ambulance (24 hour emergency number)	112
Canadian Medical Center	235-360-133
Na Homolce Hospital (Cardiac Problems)	257-272-146 / 257-271-111
Motol Hospital, Foreigners Dept.	
Adult emergencies:	224-433-681
Child emergencies:	224-433-690

**How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

- Be alert to pickpockets and purse-snatchers on trams, metros, outdoor cafes, and in the tourist areas of Prague, especially around Charles Bridge and Old Town Square.
- Carry only the amount of cash needed for the day's transactions and maintain a low profile. In addition, travelers should know the number to their bank to quickly cancel credit cards if lost or stolen.
- Keep your passports safe and in your possession while in the Czech Republic. Travel documents must be presented to the Police if requested. Keep a copy of your passport data page (including any visa pages) in a safe place separate from the passport itself; this copy can help you to apply for a new passport if yours is lost or stolen.

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- Do not change money on the street. Instead, use exchange kiosks located throughout tourist areas, at major hotels and banks.
- Use ATM machines at more secure or heavily traveled and monitored locations, which may include commercial banks, large hotels, and the airport. ATMs with a green translucent security device at the card input are usually more secure than traditional machines. Most reputable establishments in the Czech Republic accept major credit cards and their use is relatively safe. However, personal bank account activity should be regularly and closely monitored.
- Never leave anything of value unattended in a vehicle, and certainly not in plain sight, due to the risk of theft.
- There are no areas of Prague that are considered high crime areas, but all travelers are advised to exercise a heightened awareness when frequenting nightclubs and using public transportation late at night. Avoid altercations with bar personnel or other patrons as nightclub security may respond more forcefully than anticipated.
- The best and most cautious approach for obtaining a taxi is to call the company directly rather than hail one on the street. This ensures your ride is logged through the company's dispatcher. Taxis should be clearly marked (ideally with a permanently installed roof lamp and taxi sign) and must have driver's information, with registration number, company name, and price list displayed on the front doors. Taxi drivers should use a taxi meter and provide a receipt (from the meter) upon completion of the trip. Visitors may also obtain a taxi at one of the "Fair Place" taxi stands regulated by the Prague municipality. U.S. Embassy personnel are encouraged to use more reputable taxi firms such as AAA (14-0-14).
- Visitors should be cautious in crowded venues, especially en route to and at sporting events where rowdy fans may become unruly.
- Travelers should exercise common sense precautions within Prague (and in the greater Czech Republic) as is advisable in any large city.

#### **Further Information**

Emergency contact information:

Country Code: 420

Consular Section/American Citizen Services: 257-022-023

Foreign Commercial Service: 257-022-434

Regional Security Office: 257-022-308

After hours Embassy Emergency: 257-022-000

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Americans residents or visitors to the Czech Republic are encouraged to register at the U.S. Embassy Consular Section for updated country-specific travel information. For the most recent travel announcements, consult [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov). Information is also available on the Embassy's web site at: <http://www.usembassy.cz>.

**OSAC Country Council Information**

For information on the Overseas Security Advisory Council in the Czech Republic, please contact the RSO Richard Wade at 257-022-308

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